

Soma

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Soma by CarnalCoast

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Summary:

After It, Stan wants to be okay, for everyone to be okay. This proves difficult.

Soma

“Ice cream again?”

Stan kept looking down as he nodded to Eddie’s question; he didn’t need to speak, a chorus of soft “yeah”s already coming from the rest of their group. It was all instinctual by now. They got on their bikes after school, spring’s sudden heat baring down on their backs, and rode to whatever place they could safely be themselves without the threat of bullies or parents. This week’s sunniness denoted getting ice cream along the way.

Mike was already there when they arrived at the parlor, greeting as usual—half-hugging Bill, high-fiving Richie and Eddie, ruffling Ben’s hair. His high-five to Stan turned into a handshake halfway.

“You ace that math test Stan?”

For the first time that day, Stan smiled. How Mike remembered these minute details about his friends’ lives—math tests, doctors’ appointments, *parents’* birthdays—he didn’t know, but it was something he appreciated. It made him feel important—God forbid.

“You know he did, Mike. When does he ever *not*,” Richie grumbled, coming back from the counter with his double-scoop of fudge chocolate whilst glaring at the cone as if it just became sentient and spat in his face.

Stan’s smile grew into a smirk as he detected the jealousy. “He’s just being pissy because he failed.”

Ben and Mike snickered while Eddie followed Bill up to the counter; they already knew where this was going. Richie met Stan’s eyes with a matching grin, gearing himself up.

“*Incorrect*. I got a 69. Mrs. McMillan’s sending me signals.”

Simultaneously, Ben and Mike groaned—Stan merely held himself back, quickly rolling his eyes. “Gross. And Richie, a 69 is technically failing.”

“Ever heard of rounding up?”

“Richie, you did *not* get that grade, shut up. Let’s go,” Eddie cut in sharply, he and Bill returning with cones in hand. Richie held his hands up in faux innocence, gazing pleadingly at the shorter boy as he passed him.

“What’s with the tone, Eds? I *actually* studied—”

Bill sidled up close, and Stan immediately tuned out the others’ conversation. “I th-think Eddie didn’t like that comment about Mrs. Mc-McMillan,” he whispered, just quiet enough that only Stan could hear.

Muffling his laughter with a hand to his mouth, Stan nudged his friend and gave him a glance in agreement. Eddie was pretty obvious, at least to Bill, Stan, and Mike. Cows would fly before Richie ever got a clue.

It was still strange without Beverly there—times like this, when they were all together, her absence was especially stark. But they managed. She’d already visited once since she moved away, and was planning another before the school year ended. Bill and Ben took a while longer to bounce back from the initial sadness of her departure, but writing regularly back and forth to her seemed to brighten their moods.

With the proper urging from Eddie, the remaining Losers got back on their bikes and started their downhill, 5-minute journey to the riverside. Stan thought they’d found a rather picturesque little clearing—not that Derry itself was anything close to picturesque, in his opinion. But it was reasonably far away from any clowns or sewers, which was a plus.

“Eddie!”

At Richie’s yell, the other four boys’ eyes immediately darted to Eddie, seeing him motionless on his bike and his ice cream dropped on the road. They all halted, Richie wheeling over to Eddie.

“You-You okay Eddie?” Bill asked, but he got no response. Stan

followed Eddie's line of vision, and his blood ran a notch colder as he spotted the bundle of red balloons tied down outside the post office.

Not that they were It's balloons; he knew as soon as he saw them. They were shaped like hearts, a bit darker red, almost maroon. They weren't *unreal*. But they still caused a shock to run through him.

After a few seconds of silence, understanding quickly dawning on everyone, Eddie turned around with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"Uh, sorry guys, uh..."

"It's fine," Ben quickly answered, and the rest of the group nodded.

"...Want to g-go back and get another?" Bill asked, wheeling closer and motioning to the ruined cone. Eddie shook his head, taking a deep breath. Stan felt a bit proud of him—the fanny pack wasn't on today.

"Let's, uh, go."

Eddie sped off almost as soon as he said it, but they understood. Dwelling on the bad things didn't tend to turn out well.

Mike swiftly curved around to the front of the group as they started riding again, clapping a hand on Eddie's back. "Remember, we fucked that clown up!" He looked over his shoulder with a tooth-baring smile. "Right?"

"..Yeah! We fucked him up!" Ben shouted, and Bill and Richie laughed before shouting out their own victories, Richie's a touch more vulgar. They all kept laughing, and eventually Eddie joined in. The sun's rays beamed down slightly hotter.

Their spot was situated between a few oak trees just so that Stan sat in the shade, a cool breeze bouncing off the river and hitting his cheeks every now and then. It was a good day; birds and squirrels

were dancing in the branches above them, Ben and Bill were skipping rocks, Mike was trying and failing to catch fish with his bare hands, Richie was sharing his ice cream with Eddie—no explanation needed for that one. It made sense that now would be the time for Stan to feel uneasy. Of course, now was the time.

This won't last forever.

He slowly let a sigh out of his mouth, over five seconds. Nope. Rummaging through his backpack, he quickly found his History notebook and opened to his doodles, continuing the ones that were now relevant to his surroundings—trees, animals. They weren't good, certainly not as good as Bill's, but it was something.

"Oh, can I borrow your English notes from today?" Richie asked, scooting closer and beginning to dig through Stan's backpack.

"Only if you actually use them to *study*."

They don't actually like you.

Stan clenched his pencil as Richie looked up at him with a teasing grin, eyes big and marble-like behind his glasses. "What else would I use them for? What do *you* use them for? Jacking off to the symbolism found in *The Raven*? I *knew* it."

Another eye-roll. "Just get them back to me tomorrow."

You should stay home tomorrow. They wouldn't miss you.

His shoulders tensed, and luckily Richie left the conversation there, turning back to Eddie with the same grin in place. Stan urged his fingers to relax as he shaded in his crow's feathers.

It's dangerous outside. Stay in your room. Go home. Never leave.

It's dangerous in Derry. Leave.

Life is dangerous. You should've died.

He wasn't sure how long he'd been staring at the same pencil stroke, but at some point, Bill sat down next to him. Stan blinked in surprise,

wetting his dry lips.

“You a-alright?” Bill asked nonchalantly, and Stan finally noticed that he’d been tapping his foot. He stopped.

“...Yeah. Drawing,” he croaked, and relaxed in relief when his voice came out calm.

Bill nodded and pointed to the page, giving the various animals he’d drawn names and personalities. A game they shared once Stan began doing it with Bill’s doodles. Stan chuckled at the especially creative ones, and felt his heartrate slowing.

His eyes caught sight of the notebook on Bill’s lap—the writing that he’d presumably sat down to work on—and he asked without thinking, “Letter to Beverly?”

Eyebrows raising, Bill looked down at it. “Ah, y-yeah! I’m not too far in...”

He risked his life for her. He’d never do that for you.

Stan’s breath got stuck in his throat, dread creeping up his body. It started at his stomach, making him feel sick, reaching his heart and making it race faster... Once it got to his face, he’d be screwed.

“...So, do you w-wanna write a section?”

His ears started working again, and his eyes refocused on his friend’s expectant face. It was routine—the other Losers would always write additions onto Ben and Bill’s letters. Stan enjoyed it; he and Beverly had a lot more in common than he thought. They liked some of the same music, same books...

They left you down there.

Sharply, he turned to look back down at his drawings, foot tapping. When had that started again? He’d thought he was over this.

“...No thanks.”

He didn’t see Bill’s face, but heard the surprise—and worry—in his

voice. “O-Oh... Okay, you c-can later. If you want t-to.”

The only sound in Stan’s ears, for what felt like a few minutes, was the birds chirping, leaves rustling. Water splashing. Richie’s obnoxious laughter. Eddie’s clear voice, clear like a bell. He tried to focus on them, but his fingers only clenched his pencil harder.

Snap!

A hand touched his, and he reflexively relaxed his grip because it was Bill’s. The lead on his pencil was broken, and he swallowed—which took a surprising amount of effort—as Bill slowly unfolded his palm. The pencil fell onto the paper, and his hand followed Bill’s to the space between them.

Bill pulled his own sleeve down a bit further, and Stan latched onto it, rubbing small circles with his thumb into the cotton.

Clockwise. *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.*

Counter-clockwise. *One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.*

It continued, and his heartrate slowed enough, his tapping and breathing slowed enough, that he raised his head. Mike was now competing with Ben for farthest skipped stone. He took a deep breath.

For the next thirty minutes he kept at it, and slowly the others left, shouting goodbyes and nodding to Stan’s smiles. Only Bill knew how bad it got, and Stan wanted to keep it that way.

Then, it was just them. There was always the “*Do you want to talk about it?*”, and like most times, Stan shook his head. But he did finally look at Bill, hoping his eyes would say enough to convey his gratitude. Bill smiled assuredly at him, and his heart jumped in a different way—not that he appreciated it any more this time.

After a few more minutes, they opted to slowly bike home. As they neared the neighborhood, Stan noticed Bill’s tensing expression. It wasn’t too much of a mystery, how his parents could be.

“You know you can stay over at my house, if you want? My mom will

call your mom,” Stan offered, hoping to bring back some semblance of normalcy to this day. His friends didn’t need any more bad things happening to them.

“...Y-Yeah, I’d like that.”

Thankfully, as Stan hoped, the rest of their day—dinner, homework, video games—was normal. It wasn’t until early the next day, 2 AM early, did he feel that same dread, turning into outright terror as he awoke from his nightmare with a gasp, eyes darting around the pitch-blackness of his room.

He heard it and his blood froze—muffled, jerking sobs.

Someone’s in your room, oh God—

It was Bill, he remembered, and a portion of his fear dissipated, only to be replaced with worry. Though his own hands were shaking, caught in fright at the fading image of that *thing, coming closer*, he got out of bed and approached where Bill lay on the futon.

“B-Bill...” His voice wasn’t calm in the slightest, but he didn’t care. He sat on the edge of the mattress, and Bill quickly rose up, a hand over his face.

As soon as other hand reached out, Stan scooted close and brought him into his arms, clutching the back of his shirt. He heard Bill mumble into his neck, “nightmare,” and they didn’t say anything else.

The dread didn’t fully disappear—in this world, he doubted it ever would. But sitting there in the dark, their arms around each other, he started to feel better.

Author's Note:

I wrote all of this at once, so sorry if it isn't that good etc. Thank you for reading <3

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